



THE  
*CHILDREN*  
of the  
*LAKE.*








A. Loomis

Bridport



*The Countess Dowry Carnarvon*

THE  
CHILDREN OF THE LAKE



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THE  
CHILDREN OF THE LAKE

BY  
EDWARD SALLESBURY

“So many lions are in the way of the Gate Beautiful, and so many wrecks lie by the path!”—GERALD MASSEY.

LONDON  
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HR  
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MY PLAYMATE, my FRIEND, and my ADVISER, to you I bring this first gift which I have to offer, and place it in your hands, as a token of the love between us, and an acknowledgment of a debt which I can but acknowledge and not redeem.



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# THE CHILDREN OF THE LAKE.

[A Letter from MARY ELLISON to her grand-nephew, JOHN WILBRAHAM.]

The least touch of their hands in the morning, I keep it by day and by night ;  
Their least step on the stair, at the door, still throbs through me, if ever so light ;  
Their least gift, which they left to my childhood, far off in the long-ago years,  
Is now turned from a toy to a relic, and seen through the crystals of tears.

E. BARRETT BROWNING.

. . . . .

At last I keep my promise, and I send  
The story that you've asked of me. You know  
My little room that looks upon the west,  
And draws the fragrance of the dying day  
Into itself. You know the window-seat  
Half-curtained in with vine-leaf and with rose,  
Where all day long I sit, while slow faint hours

Glide past me, and that lazy stretching down,  
Which fades away amongst blue distances,  
Tempting idle-seeking eyes to rest and watch  
The pleasant riot of its light and shade  
In hollow and on upland. There I sit  
With nothing but the voice of birds, or song  
Of wandering bees, or leaves stirred by the wind  
To patter out their talk—nothing but these  
To break the fall and silence of the days,  
Which come and go so smoothly, like a stream  
Forgetful of itself, and gently led  
In dreams and deepening rest toward its end.  
The doubts that once closed over me, until  
The stars of heaven were darkened out of sight,  
Have broken, and are gone. Sweet days of faith  
Fulfil my life. They whom He took of old,  
He gently brings again. In this still time  
They come to visit me, and in their hands  
Are those love-treasures which our childhood spent



So wastefully;—once more mine own, once more  
The laughing playmates of the days that were,  
And friends in childish council. Those small hands,  
With warmth of breathing things, are softly thrust  
In mine, as if to help with guiding-touch  
(So in old wanderings, at my need, they did)  
Across that one last step, that leadeth home  
To them.

Such is my peace. Such are the still,  
Still waters that are round me, but to-day—  
Like those who leave some restful harbourage,  
Passing outside the bar, which just divides  
That quiet from the strivings of the waves,  
And leapings at each other's white-fleeced throats—  
I've gone back to another past, a past  
Long since untrodden, set aside to wait  
God's mercy, since no tears avail to wash  
One letter out; a past, through whose drear waste—

As one who journeys in a haunted land  
Where a dim horror creeps on him—great fears  
Would pluck my garments, striving, as I walked,  
To bring me on my face upon the ground,  
And fill my mouth with dust, and in my heart  
Put bitter deathly questionings ; but you  
Will read this tale, and through its tears, with which  
Mine eyes were blinded, you will know that God  
Still standeth over all, and that his stars  
Are oft at point of kindling, when our night  
Seems wholly starless. You will read this tale  
And learn to know my Margaret. The thought  
Has comforted the sorrow of my task.  
This worn-out life will soon be folded up  
And laid aside, and there'll be none to love  
My pearl, when I am gone, unless it chance  
Through these poor foolish words which speak of her.  
My love helps not. My story's all ill told.  
The lines are faintly drawn, and fail their end

Through tears and blottings. 'Tis but woman's work,  
And like our aimless drifting lives, is swayed  
By passions which are left to guide themselves.  
We women seldom hold our hearts aloof  
From daily trifles, with the force to grasp  
And gather up our thoughts in days which bring  
A larger use for them. Perchance we have  
Some faint imaginings of lovely things,  
Which haunt our mind, but like the cross-grained imps  
Of old, apprenticed to the weaker will,  
Their wayward service fails us in our need.  
And yet no chosen words, although they moved  
With shining life, and some strong master-hand  
Should set them, each with each, would find a grace  
To limn the lightest thought in the day's living,  
The merest wavings of the simple dress  
Of her God lent us for our love. And now  
Farewell. It will content me if you love  
A very little, where I loved so much.

### Mary Ellison's Story.

A FIORD which stretches to the sea, and forms  
A lake far inland, on whose either bank  
The tall trees stand in solemn company,  
And bow great heads, as if in heavy dreams,  
Or faint with long desire in feeding on  
Their own fair image ; while from shore to shore,  
Regardless of sad thought, the winds rest not  
From purple-footed wanderings on the lake ;  
A cottage of grey stone, o'erhung with thatch  
And set on a green foreland, in whose bank  
A grass-grown stair-way finds the water's edge ;  
Two children, with the sunshine in their hair,  
And from within a yet more golden light,  
Which seems for ever breaking into dawn  
Upon their brow ; and close betwixt their hands,  
A small shy stranger, made by them to take  
Full share of simple love, and happy hours ;

Life brimming over with a thousand hopes,  
Adventures, plans, and treasured mystery ;—  
Fair things, that leave no space for larger wants,  
As long as with our childish hands we build  
A world up for ourselves, and have not found  
That other lying just beyond our reach ;  
Can you look on my picture, as I write—  
The grave upstanding woods, the lake o'erflung  
With painted shadows, children laughing out  
Their heart's glee to the careless skies ? To me  
It seems my own real life ; this other life—  
This colourless, cold quiet of the days  
That float past by me—but a sleep suffused  
With dreamings, which the changing hours break not.

'Tis sixty years ago—how easily .  
We step back over such a stretch of time—  
Since first I knew my cousins Margaret  
And Hubert in their home. Alone they lived.

Themselves their world. Each filled for each the sum  
Of all the daily wants of life. They had  
No sharer of their games, unless I said  
Their father was for them their playfellow.  
He at their call would throw aside his books,  
The ink left drying in his pen, his task  
Put back into the night, and yield himself  
To "his house-fairies." They with clinging hands  
Would draw him to their haunts, and make him crouch,  
The merriest of their laughing company,  
To wait and see the Pixies sit astride  
Of bending blue-bells; or the shy wild duck  
Guiding her fleet of young ones by the bank,  
Where friendly bulrushes found hiding-place  
At sound of danger; or they'd watch the rooks  
Come slowly flapping thro' the sky, when noon  
Grew chill and grey, and gather into knots  
Of gossips, passing round their compliments  
Of daily travel, then rise up in clouds,

And cawing out their vespers in the air,  
Wheel down on their own wood, inherited  
From days of ancient battle with the herons,  
And strike amongst the firs ; or on the eve  
Of good St. John's Day, when the tongues of bird  
And beast and wakeful trees are loosed to talk  
Of what men do, these three would stand and let  
The blue shades gather round them, as the day  
Gently unslid its hold upon the wood,  
With silent breathings, lest some careless sign  
Might let the talkers grow aware of them.

In such a fashion did this happy three  
Go wandering a-field. Or when it chanced  
The elder playmate might not play, these two  
Would creep into his room, and steal their way  
With mouse-like treadings to the window niche,  
Which looked upon the lake ; there they would watch  
The windy shadows, as they moved and showed

The gleamings of the soft, pale, under-leaves ;  
The patient water flouted by the feet  
Of winds, and sad with clouds, until it spread  
Above itself a thousand rippling smiles,  
To tempt the sun to linger and to look  
Upon its face, as one, who lays aside  
Her mien of sadness when she meets her lord.  
There those two children sat, content to spend  
The passing minutes, wondering, as he wrote,  
What those sad-shining waters kept in thought  
Adown their depths, and if the water-sprite,  
Or long-haired kelpie ever fell in love  
With the bright pictures falling from the face  
Of trees, and felt a longing to come up  
And see that other world. How glad they'd be  
To show it them, and ask them of the caves  
Of pearl and coral, and the salt sea-flowers ;  
And learn that tearful tale their father told,  
Of those poor swallows, who were once, 'tis said,



Fair maidens, whom the water-king in wrath  
Drove outcast from his kingdom, and who now  
Skim hopelessly the lake's smooth edge in search  
Of their lost home ! So would they wonder on  
In silence, with their little faces set  
In such a formal fashion, he would say  
They were " the judges of his hours of state."  
Or it might be he'd call for Margaret  
By some such jesting name, as " Puss the Clerk,"  
Or Mister Secretary Goldenhair,  
And make her hold her apron out, and catch  
Strange piles of writing. How the nimble hands  
Would dip into the heap, refold the page,  
Give each its name, and set them all a-row  
In packets, waiting for his royal will !  
I've heard him sigh in looking at her work  
Of busy love, and straggling girlish hand,  
Whose jostling letters ran up-hill and down,  
Like some ill-ordered troop ; and softly say,

“The touch of those small fingers must seem strange  
To so unmannerly a crowd of fools  
And wise.” Then, without question if the sun  
In his good-humour yet outlived the hour  
He’d smiled in vain to them, they would all three  
Go tumbling out upon the lawn, most like  
In their mad play to great Newfoundland dogs.  
And each was titled. He, the elder, bore  
The name of Lion, for his brown beard’s sake ;  
Hubert was Bear, for love of the white beast  
Who was so true to Beauty, and our May  
Was Leopard, whom some fairy will had made  
A princess in disguise ; and royal games  
Were those with which the Lion and his court  
Kept holyday. Ah, happy, happy days,  
When all spent happiness as if the world  
Held so much of it that we could afford  
To spend it with unsparing hands, and fear  
No famine after ! And to me they gave

The freest share of all that happiness—  
To me, the stranger, who had lived my life  
With goats as playfellows upon the rocks  
Of Switzerland. I think I proved myself  
An apt disciple to their teaching, learnt  
By heart the lessons of those woodland days,  
And as the merry-flighted years past on  
In my new home, gained shrewdly all the craft  
Of seamanship—to “luff” and “port,” and let  
The sheet-line fly, when the black-wrinkling scud  
Swept down ; I learnt to call the cunning jays,  
And knew the wild hawk’s nest, and robber-den  
Of fox, the haunt of heron, and salmon-pool ;  
Made friends amongst the flowers within the wood,  
And learnt their story ;—so I shared the life,  
And with it all the bright thoughts of those three.

At last the change came. You have chanced to stand  
On some sheer cliff which overlooks the wave,

When earth is turning from the day, and watched  
The evening sea, with such a silver sheen  
Up-glancing, you would say some joy as great  
As that of old-world gods, lay folded there.  
Then as you stand and gaze, in very midst  
Of such delight, to which the full heart yearns,  
A sudden dimness gathers on its face ;  
The sheen is shivered off ; the countless smiles  
Pass from the wave. You raise your eyes to find  
The goodly sun has fallen from the sky,  
And drawn this gladness after him, and all  
That lies before you is a dreary waste  
Of darkening waters. So the sun went down  
On our fair home, and left it desolate.  
Few words suffice to tell the tale. There came  
To us a lady, one who claimed to be  
Some cousin twice removed of his dead wife,  
And brought with her a pale-faced girl, who moved  
In sad and listless ways. She wore a look

Of weariness ;—I've watched it many times  
Still clinging, when they smiled, about her lips.  
I used to wonder if the lake we loved,  
And glad sunshining was for her less bright  
Than 'twas for us. There's much we look upon  
With eyes of children, which some watchful sense  
Interprets to us in a childish way,  
Yet near enough the mark. The girl was fair  
Withal, and pleased the Lion's kingly eyes.  
He'd ride with her, and let their loitering ride  
Outlive the days of summer ; he would seek  
For her, that beauty which for him there dwelt  
In all the worlds of nature's ordering ;  
He would beguile their way with pleasant talk,  
Unfolding, as some chance aroused each thought,  
The kindly treasure of his mind. At times,  
With inmost soul vibrating with the sense  
Of sweet companionship, he'd yield himself  
To deeper passions, and his words would move

Amongst the nobler things of life. I've thought,  
In piecing stray and broken memories  
That still remain, he'd let himself mistake  
The mere assent and echo of his words  
For thoughts of hers. How strangely has thy hand,  
Great Heaven, mixed strength with weakness!

these wise men—

So high and god-like in their aims of life!  
So void of common instincts which belong  
To weaker wits! who take the lispings ways  
Of some school-miss for purity and truth!  
Whose wisdom sees too far to heed us change  
Our humours with our dresses, wear the heart,  
Of him we care to please, upon our tongue,  
And smoothly play the pretty knave for fools!

Meantime, we children, while the toils were set  
About the Lion—we, with shrewder eye,  
Mistrusted what we saw. We thought we found

Some jarring note, the mother, as she laughed,  
Would smooth and soften for his ear. We said  
In childish spite, and to the Lion's wrath,  
The Parrot too was trying hard to smooth  
Its wrinkled throat, and find a softer voice.  
And so—and so—at last in his own time  
Our Lion fell.

We three upon the lawn  
Were holding counsel, waiting till he came  
And brought his ready help to fashion out  
The day's adventure. One by one come back  
The happenings of that chanceful day. The cloud,  
Light like a feather, balanced overhead,  
A seeming loit'rer who had missed the track  
Of all his cloud-companions, and so hung  
Bewildered in the midst of that blue sky ;  
The daisies, with their foolish look ; the bird  
Which carolled in the elm-trees ; now I think

On it, a sort of sadness touched the notes ;  
The blue lake lying in its happy ease,  
And smiling bravely.

Long we waited there.  
The minutes glided on, and still we stood,  
And with our chatting sped the fair forenoon.  
It was May's birthday, and a holiday,  
And yet the Lion tarried. Then they said  
That I should seek for him ; but I cried out  
For "lots," and when we drew, the lot was mine.  
So, laughing at my fortune, up I got,  
And with my straw hat swinging in my hands,  
Went heedlessly. I found him in his room,  
Beside the window where he loved to sit,  
Which looked upon the lake ; and in his eyes  
There was that softness which I've seen called there  
By some strange mood of beauty in the sky  
Or water. At his side that stranger girl



Stood cold and motionless. Here, as I write,  
Her face, as though 'twere painted on the wall,  
Is still before me. Far away from him  
Her eyes were set on the blue distances,  
As if to find some meaning there ; the look  
Of pain which most times fluttered round her mouth,  
Was hard and fixed, caught, as some bird which beats  
At first against the toils and then is still,  
In lines which would not suffer to escape  
The gathered purpose. As I came and spoke  
Mine errand, with a softly-falling touch  
He let his fingers wander through my hair ;  
And then with greater gentleness than that  
Of woman's hands, which move about the bed,  
Where death and ever-watching love contend  
Betwixt them for the mastery, he drew  
Me to him ; smoothing back a wind-blown curl,  
With lips that made soft pausing on my brow,  
He said "There's space enough within our love

For this one too," but she, as one who dreams  
Signed not, nor spoke, nor shook from off her face  
That distant look which seemed to bear her soul  
Across the waters, as they stretched away,  
In searchings for some spot on that far side  
Where for a while to save itself. Then I,  
In fear and wonder at the thing he said,  
Slipt from his hands, and went towards the lawn.  
How strange to trace a child's imagining  
Thro' all the simple and yet subtle paths  
Of life wherein it shares! A sense of change  
Was tingling in my veins. The sky o'erhead  
Seemed altered, as I stept upon the grass;  
Yet of the change, and what new thing would be,  
Childlike, I had but fashioned to my thought  
A fear about our playmate, for I said,  
He would desert us, lingering long days  
To pet with his soft hands the glossy hair  
Of that girl standing by him with dark eyes

And wearied lips. Then, as a sort of awe  
Came on me, doubting what to say to those  
Who poured impatient questionings, I saw  
The Lion coming in his careless stride.  
He sat down lightly, finding pleasant hands  
For all the three of us, and said, "Dear Bear,  
Dear Leopard, and my sunny silver Olive"—  
(They called me so for reasons long worn out ;  
Because, they said, such gladness found its life  
Beneath my quiet ways)—" I've wandered back  
To-day, and set before me that fair work.  
We've helped the happy hours to weave for us ;  
Wherein the wood, the water, and the hill  
Have lent us service, shared in all our games,  
Found texts for all our sermons. Such glad days  
We've spent, that I could almost fear excess  
Of sunshine on our lives. Take thanks, dear three,  
For all your share. My Leopard and my Bear  
Have been so wisely good in will and way—

So full of tender love and loyalty—  
That never Lion yet has ruled to find  
His kingship sit so light on him. And you  
Dear Olive, as in times of long ago,  
Have proved the sweetest gift from gods to men.  
And now your Lion brings within your court  
Another playmate. You shall find for her  
The same true duty which you love to lay  
Before his feet, and crown her mother's life,  
New found, with those love-offerings you waste  
In gracious kisses lost amongst his beard.  
Dear May, my secret's told, my fair surprise,  
My birthday gift ; I bring thee for thy love  
A mother." But the child, whose little face  
Was dark with trouble, when she heard the word,  
Fell sobbing on his breast, as though her sobs  
Would draw the very life from her, and cried,  
"I want no mother ; I have one who sleeps  
Beyond the hills—of whom you used to tell—

The patient dweller in the sky ; so fair  
And good, and not as this you give to us.”  
So sobbed she out her pain ; and had the cloud,  
Which swam above us, fluttered down and paused  
Submissively beneath the Lion’s feet,—  
He’d sooner looked for it. ’Tis so with men.  
They live in their own atmosphere of thought,  
And whilst they’ll tell the courses of the stars  
Next hundred years, those homely happenings,  
Which make our life of household thought, escape  
Their wisdom. He had little looked to find,  
Lost in his dreams of kindly happiness,  
Such rebel hearts within his garrison  
Who would withhold the giving of their love  
To help him where he loved. I must have grieved  
To see the sudden shade, which darkened out  
His smiling, as in tenderness he bent,  
And sought to soothe her passion. But the child,  
Refusing comfort, still kept sobbing out,

“ I have a mother,” till at last she broke  
Loose from his arms, and running past us, took  
Her bursting heart alone within the woods.  
Then he rose up, and went with heavy step,  
And such a sorrow in his eyes, as one  
Who, coming from far travel, thought to find  
His dear home, and his wife, and little ones,  
Smiling their wonted welcome, and has found  
The blackened rafters and the smoking thatch  
Which fire and sword have left to him. ’Twas thus  
It chanced about our Lion’s love, and thus  
May’s birthday and our holiday were spoilt.

That night, when all was quiet but the clock  
Which went on ever ticking to itself,  
Came Margaret and stood by my bedside.  
Her feet were bare, a thin shawl partly clad  
Her arms. Then, in unloosening of her grief,  
She cast her soul upon the very earth

Before my feet : " Could God forgive her sin,  
Or would her Lion ever look again  
On her who was his child. Her sin had turned  
Their faces from her, and cast back their love.  
If all dear things, if life, all life—it seemed  
So small to give !—its pleasures laid aside,  
Might count for something ; if 'twere not too late,  
To show her Lion of the love she'd spend  
In daily care of her new mother ; if—  
And yet no 'if' could help her from her sin."  
And thus the child's heart, turning on itself,  
Poured out reproaches ; long the flood flowed on,  
Before its passion yielded to my touch,  
And chiding, petting, each in turn, I drew  
Her softly to me. As she wove her hands  
In weariness about my neck, sleep came  
And robbed her of her pain.

We're apt to talk

But lightly of a child's grief ; and are wrong ;  
For there's no greater in our ken of life.  
It has no measure and no bounds, counts not  
"This haply might be better and that worse,"  
But in one wave flows over all its banks.  
When grief is older, we have learnt it comes  
With breaking of our daily bread, and stays  
A week or month, or one full year may be,  
A dull persistent guest ; and so 'tis placed  
And counted with the other things of life.

With the first sun May's trouble rose again  
To sojourn long with her. Each sun that dawned  
Had lost the joyous shining of those days,  
Which ever drifted further out of reach,  
With all their sunny happiness. A veil  
Of shadow seemed to hang between and part  
The Lion from his bride. In after-years  
We learnt the tale. From childish days the girl



Had loved some thriftless cousin, who had earned  
Her mother's hatred. For a while her love  
Endured ; at last the stronger will o'erbore,  
And crushed her to obedience, making void  
Her whole life's purpose. There are some might plead  
How keen a mother's weapons to constrain  
A girlish heart ; how home, when 'tis not home,  
Becomes a hell of suffering for the life,  
Which cannot choose but dwell there. Yet I hold  
The suffering had been lighter than the wrong,  
Whereby she sought escape. What right had she  
To give this remnant, this so mean a part  
Of wasted hopes and loving, where she took  
Full offering of a life without reserve ?  
Against her soul she sinned, and quenched its light  
In treadings of despair, and let herself  
Go drifting, like some helpless boat at night,  
Caught in strong currents, having lost all marks  
By which it made its course.

Through some mischance  
Our Lion learnt the tale. 'Twas 'gainst her will,  
For womanly she knew to bear her pain  
In silence. So it chanced—through evil chance—  
For else, I think, her life, like some hurt flower,  
Yielding to all his summer gentleness,  
Had blossomed out anew, and shed for both  
Its fragrance; but the blow, which would have smote  
Some lesser-hearted man with lighter force,  
So broke and swept away all he'd built up  
Of trusted happiness, that not enough  
Of ruin stood, wherewith to build again.  
With children's eyes we watched his pain, nor knew  
The why or wherefore; only this we knew,  
That happy things were changed. Our Lion friend  
Brought not his helping to our play, as once  
He did; although he'd sit and share with us  
Our morning schooling, with a look so sad,  
And face so tenantless of smiles, I've seen

The rebel tears spring up and fight their way  
All down May's cheeks, and leave great angry blots  
Upon her school-girl's work. She too I thought  
Had passed within the shadow of that change.  
Her mood of smiles and laughter-loving ways  
Were oft'ner clouded as with thought. She seemed  
To pause and make first guesses what life meant  
Beyond that sheer enjoyment of the sun,  
And air, and silver water, and of home  
With loving playmates, which till then fulfilled  
The circle of her thoughts. She set herself  
To care for her new mother with those arts  
And little kindnesses, of which a child  
Keeps simple store. With each new day she brought  
And laid beside her plate at breakfast-hour,  
Wild flowers, the spoils of early wanderings,  
Still wet and shining in their morning dew,  
And sweet with woodland life, her little hands  
Had parted well-nigh unawares from them.

She'd sit and tell her all the strange folk-lore  
Learnt of old women in the hills, who knew  
So well the fairy-ways. She'd smooth for her  
A mossy seat beneath the chestnut-trees,  
From under whose green thicknesses there came  
The song that bees mix with their work ; and when  
The sky was bluest, and the lightest wind  
Shivered the painted pictures of the lake,  
She'd gently draw her to the boat, which lay  
With half-loosed sails, as some strong-pinioned bird  
Which gathers on its folded wings the sun,  
In pausing from its flight ; then as they loosed—  
She and her brother Hubert—from the shore,  
They'd wear upon their faces such a cloud  
Of thought, and watch with such grave-seeming eyes  
Each breath of wind that crept amongst the trees,  
And so make taut or slack a rope, and pass  
Gruff words of sailor-meaning ; you'd have said  
There never yet had sailed upon the sea

Such crafty mariners, with store so large  
Of weather-wisdom. Then the Lion's bride  
Would yield all will and way, and thus be lost  
A little distance from herself and find  
Some path of happier thought. I've seen a smile  
Just break the weary rest of those sad lips,  
When these two children, in their care for her,  
Were busied with their sailor-craft.

With time

Came other changes. I was sent once more  
To Switzerland, and Hubert to his school.  
Then first these two were parted. Much he wrote  
Of how they spent last days of home in talk  
And wanderings, sweeter in the thought of loss,  
To take last greeting from the lake and hills,  
And bid them keep their beauty till he came  
Again. One night, in looking on the lake,  
Made many colours by the dying sun,

May said, " Dear Hubert, with these days new things  
Have found a place within my mind, and changed  
Old thoughts ; and now the coming years seem not  
As happy as we used to think. I feel  
We're somehow like those children in the tale,  
Who used to be so happy till they crost  
The garden gate, and then came back to find  
A sadness in their games. I've lost the wish  
To build such palaces again as once  
We built, when for our fancy's want we took  
So largely of the precious stones and gold  
Which lay before our hands. But still I see  
A way to make life beautiful. Our talk  
Has loved to linger round those knights of old,  
Who would forbear, for very honour's sake,  
To sin against their own great hearts ; and they,  
In spite of toil and sufferings, must have made  
Life sweet and noble. We will train our hearts,  
Like these who warred against the wrong, to hold

Great purposes of good ; and as we learn  
Their knightly fashion, we will make our love  
Find all provision for the wants of life,  
As their love did, in those long wanderings  
Amongst the dangers of the world." So spoke  
The child, unloosing from herself the weight  
Of childish thinkings, with the look of one,  
Who, having pondered with much toil of mind  
Some weighty thing, at last unfolds his thought.  
He, as they walked, went thinking of her words,  
And made a home for them within his heart.





## BOOK II.

THE years have come and passed ; again the day  
Breathes out its last upon the lake. The sun  
Has set,—its glory and its trouble both  
Are passing after it ; and now there comes  
That blessed truce between the day and night,  
When God's peace of the twilight yet arrests  
The parting of the two. The woods which hold  
Their branches up so patiently, and yearn  
With opening veins for the first breath of spring  
In the quick air, receive the sun's last grace  
In such warm floodings of soft amber light,  
You'd say they had forgotten winter's grief  
And nakedness, to dream of the new life  
Which stirs within them. At their feet the lake



Lies careless of its proffered loveliness,  
With bosom just a-heave. Sweet weight of sleep  
Has well-nigh stilled the pulses of its life.  
I've often wondered in the years of grief  
If there would ever come a time, when God  
Would let a calm descend upon our life  
Like this, from which the passion and the pain  
Of living should have passed, and left to us  
A breathing pause, an hour of twilight peace,  
When the day's heat and glare are faded out,  
And night yet tarries.

As I speak, the hour  
Is changing. From the happy wood there dies  
That sunlight sweetness, as last kisses die  
Slowly on lovers' lips. The purple shades  
Which hang upon the dying day, and smooth  
A dusky track for treadings of the night,  
Are creeping in, each to its hollow lair

Along the forest-side ; and over all  
The dark blue, growing, bending down on us  
A nearer sympathy. I've seen a look,  
As holy in its love and earnestness  
As yonder blue of heaven, possess the face  
Of Margaret. They both are standing now  
Beneath that blue ; no longer children ; one  
Is leaving boyhood, and the other wears  
The sweetest womanhood that ever girl  
Put on. There's much is altered in our home.  
The Lion and his wife—I've learnt to grieve  
For her, she was so gentle when he died—  
Are gone from us together to their rest ;  
And now the veil has fallen, and each knows  
The other better. It may chance the love  
Which failed them in their life has found a home,  
And kinder flowering-time. One gentle face  
Is newly come amongst us, since these died---  
My mother's ; so we four make up our world.

My May and Hubert had outstayed in talk  
The twilight. Now they stand beside the hearth  
Which yawns with kindly warmth. Upon her face  
The low flames flutter. For a moment's while  
They stain it with their burning, leaping up ;  
Then snatch themselves away, and let it rest  
In its own shade. Her dress in soft faint ways  
Goes rippling downwards, and the shadows hide  
Amongst loose wavy foldings, creeping close  
And nestling to her side. How fair she stands !  
Like some lithe ash-wand springing straight and true  
In sunny growth ! I watched her stand to-day  
Alone upon the terrace-walk ; she moved  
In utter fearlessness of that vast sky,  
Which leans with such reproach on you and me—  
Her step so freely planted on the earth,  
Her very treadings on it seemed a part  
Of earth's own life. Upon her head the sun  
Shone down. He loves to linger on her path

With gentlest whitest light. No favoured shrine,  
Made fragrant with the wealth of Eastern lands,  
Was ever found with grace to bear aloft  
An offering-gift so costly, as the seal  
Of all his sweetest things which God has set  
Upon that brow. How fondly I have watched  
Its fire of earnest purpose, like a star,  
And seen it travelled by the shades of thought,—  
Full of soft lines and motions, like the sea,  
Whose breadth and freshness, and sweet depths of rest  
Find image there. Yet to my thought her mouth  
Was ever dearer. 'Twas as though the lips  
Could not repress the love that from within  
O'erflows, but some of it must needs escape  
To feed the clinging smile. I've seen them pale,  
Those lips, and bruised with grief, and colourless,  
But ever saintly beautiful. I think  
An angel kissed them when we saw it not.  
I've often wished some painter, when he drew

His saints of old, had seen my darling's mouth,  
With all that sweetness rippling round its lines ;  
So would he not have needed other lips,  
But given all love to her.

Their talk is turned

To earnest questionings about the life,  
Which lies before them. "It is strange," he says,  
"Dear May, that we stand guessing thus of life,  
Its ways and meanings, when so soon it comes  
Explaining all to us ; and yet its right  
And wrong seem so inwrought amongst themselves,  
Like interweavings of the light and shade  
Within the wood, mine eye fails in its search  
To disentangle them. You know that maze  
Of broken sunlight, like a wizard's spell  
Upon the path, perplexing eye and foot ;  
'Tis so with life for me—'tis blurred, confused—  
The lines are crossed—there is no path amidst—

Not even just an arrow's track of light  
Which passes onwards reaching to an end.  
In this dim wood all truth is so beset  
With half-truths and with falsehood, so o'ergrown  
With forms half-real and half-unreal and false  
Self-made necessities of life, the cry  
Of loyalty with which we fain would take  
Truth's service on us, dies upon our lips,  
And leaves us either with divided heart,  
To fight a fight of shadows, or to join  
The crowd, and make the world's highway more smooth  
By one new treading." So he said, and she—  
Whilst still the flame lapped round the beechen logs  
In silent greediness, with voice that was,  
In risings and in fallings of sweet speech,  
A true handmaiden of the soul within—  
"Dear Hubert, you have lost your forest track ;  
You stand in doubt ; the giant trees close round ;  
Their falling shade is woven over it ;

And yet the sun, and after him the stars,  
Will guide you rightly, if you lift your eyes.  
We carry axes for the way ; the wood  
Must yield to them if wielded by brave hands.  
I think we seek not, as we enter life,  
To bear such hearts with us as shall suffice  
In days of bitter need. They've not been trained  
Our friends, to stay by us in pain and doubt,—  
Our councillors to teach us by the way  
Of all things great and noble,—but instead  
Are mere fair-weather playfellows, who sing  
In the sun-shining. Yet no other friend  
Can bring such helping to a man at last,  
If only he endures to serve long years  
Of faithful service. You have read the tale  
Of the dead Bruce ; the knight who bore that heart,  
And threw it 'midst his foes, then fought his way,  
And died on it. Long since. And some since  
then

Have placed their heart far forwards, and have pushed  
Through bitter wounds, and, reaching forwards, left  
Their lesson ; but to-day it moves us not ;  
We're grown neglecters of ourselves—so much  
With which we're cumbered in this work-day world,  
So much of hand and action, there's no time  
To care about the stature of our souls.  
I think our pulses beat not like the pulse  
Of those old heathens, whose large heart and brain  
Were ever kindled with desire to find  
The type of perfect things. How great they seem !  
What earnestness and grandeur in their thoughts !  
Those men who gave such service to their souls,  
And spent their lives upon it, as men toil  
Amongst us, tending some fair-lying plot  
Of sunny garden, which they strive to make  
From day to day more beautiful, and teach  
With patient hand its rarest plants to yield  
Their fruit. 'Twas thus those seekers of old time,



By honouring God's image, came so near  
To God himself."

*H.*—" Yet life asks not our leave,  
But takes us unawares, before we've drawn  
The outlines of our plan, before we've made  
An end of duly saying to ourselves,  
All that we'll do and all forbear. To-day  
Time fails our wants. We cannot sit and scheme  
Life out, as those old Greeks did in the shade  
Of school and column. They who work the best,  
The whole twelve hours of day in the world's field,—  
Theirs is the simpler instinct; men who keep  
No great imaginings within their breast,  
But without question of themselves work out  
Each one his work, and seek no light which falls  
Outside of daily duties. They who think  
Above the thinkings of their fellow-men,—  
Whose hearts are strung to music, that the crowd

Hears not,—their labour fails, altho' 'tis wrought  
Of golden threads—unfinished, ill-arranged,  
All wrong with the world's wants. These purple dreams,  
These burning visions which possess our souls,  
And seem to lift them upwards from themselves,  
Stay not ; their glory's spent, their communing  
Is ended, and our souls are left to weep  
What they have lost, like one who in his dreams  
Has seen a lovely face, and thence to him  
In the hard garish light of day all things  
Seem colourless and cold." He spoke, and she,  
As red flames rose and fell upon her cheek,  
Softly, as though they feared to touch it, said—  
"These troublings of the waters of the soul,  
As if some spirit passed on them,—these vows  
Of nobleness we make to our own hearts,—  
Come not in truth to dwell, but for a while  
To linger with us. How they come to us,  
I know not ; 'tis unbidden ; at the sound

Of some stray music-notes, which pierce and wound,  
Or earnest words which fall from lips we love,  
Or when the blue of heaven bends down on us  
Its look of loving with a joy that makes  
The quick tears blind our sight, like swelling tides  
They rise above the flood-gates of the heart,  
And bear us with them at their will ; they come,  
They go, with noiseless movement of their wings,  
And hearts that rose up to the overflow  
Of gladness, now are tenanted of vain  
And sick desire. And yet we've never sought  
To raise a palace which should tempt their stay,  
And make them loiter ere they turn and seek  
The heavenly places. Are we fain they'd dwell  
In courts, unswept, ungarnished, where a throng  
Of petty passions and of mean desires  
Are herded at their ease ? We should not chide  
The angels that they stay not ; let us chide  
Their presence rather. Yet I surely know

That they who bear their high imaginings  
Abreast the world, will walk with naked feet  
On stony paths ; will suffer while the world  
Is feasting, keeping holiday ; will fail  
Like other men, save that they fall worse hurt  
From higher places, and the busy world  
Finds time to smile amongst themselves, and take  
Fresh grace of heart to follow their own ways.  
Their hearts are full to breaking at each step ;  
Their footprint in the sand is red ; their work  
Falls broken from their hands ; and yet the world,  
With all its carelessness and scorn of them,  
Is but their servant. Though it heedeth not  
Their pain, 'twill slowly follow, where they trod,  
Until it enters on their heritage,  
And reaps the harvest of their tears. Think not  
The world will find a healing for itself  
By all its meaner thoughts. We'll not fight down  
That deadly growth of ills, which hides the heaven

From men, and makes this might-be happy earth  
So sad a dwelling-place for those who live  
The weaker in our midst ; we'll not awake  
From all this labour and this ease of life,  
And find a saving for the pain that cries  
To us, till first we save our hearts by help  
Of every noble thought God grants to them.  
Those men, who stood as beacons, holding up  
Great lights of hoping, think you not, they bore,  
Through secret days, warm quickening in their breasts,  
The seeds of what they did ? While yet they moved  
With other men, and the dull crowd knew not  
The healing work in them, they wearied not  
In laying up great wealth of nobleness,  
Ere yet the need arose."

But here their talk  
Was ended, for the lamps were lit, and drove  
With their unfriendly shining from the room

The firelight shadows that had curtained them,  
Those ghost-like list'ners of soft-moving talk.  
And thus they often talked ; some days in shade  
Of solemn pines, where, as they sat, the clouds  
Went sailing by in silent dreamy flight,  
And shadows falling from them, as they passed,  
Just stirred the hills, like whispers from a world  
Forgotten long ago ; or where some nook  
In tangled coverts, keeping all its grace  
A gentle prisoner closely-hid, upraised  
A wall of tapestry, on which the light  
And shade were deftly twisted in and out,  
Above its sanctuary of moss and flowers ;  
Or when the sky and lake made merriment  
And laughed together, as the summer winds  
Came tripping it in silver-sandalled troops  
Between them, they'd unloose their boat and let  
The pleasant hours go gliding past astern  
With the low plashing waves ; and thus each day,

On lake or mountain, in their talk they searched,  
In common climbings to the very springs,  
For that which makes life noble. Hand-in-hand  
These two had passed together through the years  
Of childhood ; hand-in-hand, that past put by,  
They started on their journey through the world.  
Ah me ! how brave a picture to mine eyes  
It is, those comely children in the dawn  
And flushing of their youth, with such a fire  
Of soul, and such a hope set on their brow  
In challenge to the life untried ! The girl  
Was stronger ; standing fearless on the earth,  
As if God made her not to feel the want  
Of other helping but Himself. Alone,  
For others' saving, like some foreland rock,  
She'd stood and fought the waves. And he, who dwelt  
Beneath the shadow of that greater soul,  
Would trace within himself in fainter lines  
Some image of those stainless thoughts which lived

In her, as stars that dwell in heaven and reach  
Their shining down to others. All her life  
Ran on in sunny flowings, like a stream,  
And seemed to sing but sweeter for the stones  
Across its path. Her choicest hoards of love  
Were garnered for her brother's use, and spent  
Unsparingly within the daily world  
Of home. Thence they o'erflowed to man or child  
That came within her presence, thence again  
To every creature feeding from her hand,  
Aye ! to the very stranger dog that lounged  
Upon the highway in the sun. Her love  
Was like kings' treasures, into which at will  
All comers dip their hands and find enough.  
She grieved so readily for others' pain,  
Her heart, I think, could not have made device  
To shut it out from her. Her little hands  
Were always busy from old childish days,  
In trying to undo the knots which held



Another's burden. You had loved to watch  
The earnestness that clung about her look  
And gesture,—life, its everyday grey skies,  
And daily ebb and flowing, and the world  
Of common nature kept apart for her  
Sweet voices of their own. So quick a blood  
Leapt in her pulses, you'd have said at times  
Its passionate and strongly-flowing stream  
Had over-mastered her ; for she was warm  
In righteous anger, and she spoke as those  
To whom life's issues are so clear, they speak  
With cost unreckoned. Yet to be with her  
Was like the breathing of the mountain air,  
Men breathe so gladly. You were always free  
To differ, show the fault (and many times  
Her eager sympathies would lead her wrong,  
And she'd confess it to herself and you  
With cheeks that bore the blame) of her conclusions.  
There's not a rarer thing on earth to find

Than this most gracious freedom. Where we love  
The most, we least allow the right to think  
As God has made the mind ; but she who searched  
For truth, in constant humblings of herself,  
Upheld this liberty a holy thing  
Within our home. She had, by fairy-gift,  
As beauty falls to one or two, a force  
To govern to her mood the mind of men  
And women. When she stood within a group  
Of careless talkers, I have seen a change  
Steal like a shifting light upon the face  
Of those who talked. My darling, who was mine  
To love—whose soul shone through each lightest word  
To gladden others—whom I used to watch  
Stand in her fearless beauty, till the tears  
Have risen within my heart,—I count the hours,  
The hours that loiter and divide the life,  
So steeped in pain and over-wept with tears,  
From that which wears the crown of changeless love.

The days passed on, and closer with their flight  
Those two lives grew together, till they seemed  
Two voices inter-twined, of which one guides,  
The other leaning on it to fulfil  
Their common song. And much she spent herself  
For him, with constant planning that her life  
Should be a garden for his love, wherein  
All herb and blossom should be trained to yield  
Their uses to his hand. 'Twas ever so,  
In all their ways and doings in the home  
Of childish days. She'd rise with song of lark,  
The only sleepless thing whose small feet stirred  
About the house, and find her brother's books—  
Those books too wise for women ;—through the hours  
No sun yet gladdened, she would vex her heart  
In seeking for itself a lonely way  
Amongst strange-written letters. There she'd sit,  
Her slight child's finger pushed along the lines,  
Her head bent forward, and her clouded brow

O'ershadowing the page, and eyes which knew  
No will to wander. 'Twas those patient eyes  
Whose traitor redness told the tale, and roused  
The Lion's wrath. With little gracious hands  
She put his chiding by, and gained free grace  
To bear her brother company in tasks  
Of schoolboy learning. She would sing his songs  
To sweeten hours of wandering ; she would read  
His books, his stories of old worlds and new,  
That so their each day's thought might flow abreast-  
In common channels, and she might find place  
As equal partner in the things he loved.  
And thus she lived for him, and the two lives  
Made one.

Long since had Hubert made his choice  
To be a painter, so his mind was set,  
And, as they'd often settled it in talk,  
She'd go with him to Rome, and many plans

They made and then unmade, how they would spend  
In this, how save in that ; so small a hoard  
The Lion, dwelling ever with his books,  
And learned rather in their ways than those  
Of men, had left his children. I, whose heart  
Kept ever turning towards their land of dreams,  
Should live again a prisoner in the snows  
Of dreary Switzerland ; and then we used  
To grieve in common for the little house  
Beside the lake, and for the lake itself,  
Which ever was so great a friend, and kept  
Such store of smiles and pretty reasonings ;  
And these we sighed to think would be henceforth  
For others. Never had we known till then  
How deep its love lay in our hearts. These plans  
Were broken by a chance. A schoolboy friend  
Who'd loved the Lion left some thousand pounds  
To Hubert, on condition he should make  
His study of the law, and with it gave

His books and chambers in some gloomy court.  
Then Hubert, seeing how we still might make  
Our home together, and be free from care  
About the straitened means, put by his plan  
Of life, with a deep sorrow that he kept  
To his own heart, apart from us ; and she,  
Who had been braver for herself than him,  
She feared, when judging of that dearer life,  
Her own defiance of the world, and saw  
Untruly in her love. Besides, she erred,  
I think, unknowing. We whose narrow care  
Is spent in fitting things that do not fit,  
And making life run smooth, who have no will  
Which bends not back upon itself with change  
Of circumstance, we do not rightly know  
That strong necessity, which finds for men  
Within themselves the issues of their life.  
And thus in purest love her voice was set  
Against his own heart's speaking, and prevailed.

The eve before he went from us, I mind,  
They sat in pleasant talkings, and he said—  
“ In leaving you, in leaving this dear home,  
I feel as if the love these happy years  
Have garnered for our use, will surely yield  
A strength encompassing the ways of life.  
In lonely hours to be, when each shall feel  
The heart's desire of other, then I think  
We will renew old days, retrace old paths,  
Where changeful talk of many things has led  
Our thoughts, and pause again upon the edge  
Of those sweet waters, where we bathed our lips  
So deeply, taking to the heart's desire,  
And sparing not. Do you remember once  
We sat as children, prating over life,  
And you, as if you'd found its secret out,  
Unfolded thoughts of knighthood which should make  
Our lives more noble, and exalt our love  
With joy of striving towards some chosen end ?

And many times, far back in bygone days,  
We would repeat this covenant of hearts,  
Whilst you with your child's fancies led my life  
Up higher. I've turned back upon that day  
To find a truth beneath your knightly dream.  
Had we sought less, content to find in love  
A meaner purpose, it had failed to bind  
Our hands as closely for the journey's need.  
Yet on the sunlight of our common way  
There falls a fear and doubting. Can you think  
What 'tis to walk in silent spectral woods,  
Thro' the close-clinging night, and hear a step  
Which dogs your going? There's a thought which creeps  
Upon me like that step, and oft-times says  
That I am like a climber, who has held  
His friend's strong hand, and climbed beyond his  
strength ;  
His eye and brain are overtasked; he doubts  
If utmost striving may make safe for him



His dizzy footing ; it is so with me ;  
While you stand there,—you having perfected  
The sureness ”— “ Hush,” she broke in mournfully,  
“ We neither know our weakness nor our strength.  
He only does who weighs it in the scale  
Against His coming trial. For our love,  
We dare, I think, turn back and look with eyes  
Of fearless seeking on its happy days.  
Our hearts have been so held in bonds, so joined  
In partnership of thought, that each in each  
Has found the shadow of its own desire  
And purpose. Though we walk in distant paths,  
And hands no longer lie hand-locked, in heart  
We still shall be together as of old.  
There is no earthly bar with force to break  
Their communing, who look on God’s dear stars,  
And make them witness to the work they seek  
To work within themselves. And still our vow  
Of knighthood, as in childish talk we called

That summer's-day resolve, shall stand our pledge."

"Yet all fair things are first to suffer hurt."

He paused. "This love in which our lives have  
grown,

In whose full-searching sunlight we have stood,

Each nature to its smallest faults revealed,

With no gloss—no hand laid across the heart—

And no withholding of the smallest thing—

This dear and priceless love, if once 'twere found

With flaw or blemish, there's no thought of ours,

For very sake of such a costliness,

Could make it one again. But now the eve

Is passing; sing to me some song I love."

And so she sang to him "Lord Gerald's Tryste :"

He has saddled peerless Hakim,

Comrade of the chase and fight;

He has whistled Brinda to him,

Watcher of his bed by night.

Hakim stays by rack and stalling,  
Spite of love and words of grace ;  
Brinda comes not to his calling—  
Wistful looks she in his face.

Hands uplifted as in warning,  
Elspie runs out with a cry ;  
“ I have dreamt a dream, ere morning,  
That I saw you fall and die.

“ Drops, great drops, of blood were tangled  
In the yellow of your hair ;  
And with cruel swords they mangled  
All your beauty lying there.”

Forest branches rustle o'er him,  
He can hear them mutter plain ;  
There is danger there before him,  
If he do not turn again.

And a little bird keeps crying,  
    Flitting on from spray to spray—  
“If thou would'st not to thy dying,  
    Go not to thy tryste to-day.”

“Birdie, had you pleaded sweeter,  
    I would keep the word I gave ;  
I have said that I will meet her,  
    Though it be above my grave.”

And then as often, whilst he watched her face,  
Which seemed to gather on itself strange lights  
Of music, as she sang, he bent his head  
And sighed, “How long shall this heart's strife endure,  
How long shall this voice kindle, as with flame,  
The sleeping blood, this face upbraid the sloth  
Of one so worthless and unprofitable ?  
Oh ! at this last to gather strength and rise  
From pain of dreamings, and with fearless hands

To take this swerving heart and tear away  
Each pulse that falters. So I might arise  
And hold my share in noble fight with her,  
And win great peace of soul. But now this voice  
And beauty are to me in vain, like moons  
Which burn and profit not the barren sea.”





### BOOK III.

THEY lie before me, open to my hand,—  
The faded yellow leaves. How strange a light  
Is thrown athwart the past ; and as it gleams  
On vault and grave, the long-lost dead stand forth,  
With features sharper truer than in life.  
So many things unheeded of our eyes  
Return, when all their teaching counts for nought,  
And stand in naked meaning ;—eyes forsooth  
Which let the world float past them as they drowse,  
Grow keen of vision in the afterlight  
To read and understand. I turn the leaves  
And slowly trace, with sick reproachful heart,  
His record of himself. Most piteous task  
For one whose love has only strength to weep

The vain "It might have been" above that life.  
His hand had missed its aim; the old unrest  
And doubtings of himself which might have passed  
In happier days, had brain and heart made cause  
For him, and wrought together lovingly,  
Distempered all his life. He made few friends.  
And in the dreary learning of his books  
Found sad companionship. His heart strayed back  
In pinings for the lusty air he breathed,  
When wandering with his pencil in old days;  
Each grace of those great hills which seemed to him  
As friends;—frail clouds that threw such tender weight  
Upon their broad up-towering breasts, blue lakes  
Which rested in the hollows of their side;  
Pines shadow-clothed and holding lonely talk  
With passing night-winds;—all came back in thought,  
With such a pain of longing as men feel  
Who journey over burning sands, and faint  
For wells they find not. In his heart there rose

Sweet visions of the fondly-pictured days,  
Spent in a happy service to the things  
He loved. And yet he was too brave to find  
An easing of his pain in words. I used  
To think the smile grew slower on his face  
Than once ; but that was all ; no other sign  
Betrayed the shadows, closing round his life,  
Ere yet my mother's illness in those days  
Kept us apart from him.

But here the page  
Lies open, telling how there came a time  
Of grief, and loosed the clasping of those hands  
Which long had held together. O my God !  
I know thou seest where our straining eyes  
Reach not ;—and yet that she for whom the birds  
Sang with such welcome—she for whom alone  
The sun would fain have shone—whose love found place  
For smallest flowering plant and creeping thing—



So sweet with touch of hand and heart to use—  
So sweet for others' using—that for her  
The thorn should be against her breast, the stones  
Beneath her feet, and the mixed grief and sin  
Of others for her lot!—it must have been  
In love, in constant, far-foreseeing love,  
Thou mad'st her wander through these paths of pain,  
And clothe herself with beauty which thy hand  
Should gather at the last.

Now see the page.

It is the record of his books and friends  
And lonely hours with space for wandering thoughts.  
How sad a witness to the misplaced life  
Are these dumb patient leaves! Just pause and read  
This song he writes; it breathes his own unrest:

“By the side of the sea, like one who striveth,  
There runneth on ever the low sea-wall;

Where the sands are white which the wild wind driveth,  
And the sands are yellow where warm waves fall.

Out of porch and of casement the lights are streaming,  
On the face of the moon the grey clouds win ;  
And I stand in a mood of profitless dreaming,  
In a dream of the world without and within.

In the light is a maiden, whose fair face maketh  
The tenderest shadow above her book ;  
And the look of that face in its stillness awaketh  
The desire of a life which I once forsook.

And there ceaseth not ever from eve until dawning,  
Where the waves are contending in wild unrest,  
Such a cry as outbreaks in reproach and in scorning,  
From a soul with the pain of a world opprest.

For it speaks of a heart and a hand that falter,  
Of a purpose and will that are bent astray,

Of the powerless prayer which in vain would alter  
The waste of a life which is cast away.

And I turn from that face with a conquered repining,  
From that soft sweet face and the home in its light ;  
Let it shine for all those who may live in its shining !  
It is not for the watcher who troubles the night."

And now read on and learn the end.

“ To-day

I walked with Lambert ; 'tis a tutored mind  
Like some Dutch garden, where all plants must grow  
To one set rule and order,—none may climb  
An inch in safety from the pruning-hook.  
I sat amongst my books, till daylight passed  
And left us dark together ; mind and eye  
Both drooped awearied. There are tales they tell  
Of men who covenanted with the fiend ;

If true, 'twas when the crawling shadows lay  
About them thickly, in some low-browed room,  
Where the fresh sunlight comes reluctantly ;—  
'Tis so the compact had been sooner signed  
And sealed, than where the sky watched over them."

“Since yesterday we've met again. We talked  
Of many things ; her voice is very sweet ;  
It leans upon you ; it is like the touch  
Of some caressing hand ; and when her words  
Are ended, you would think some golden thread  
Whereby you held, had broken in your hands.”

. . . . .  
. . . . .

“To-day we sat beneath the elms. With eyes  
Downheld, and fingers plucking at her cloak,  
She told her story ; as a girl she staked  
The winning or the losing of her life  
Upon that chance, and lost. How sad a wreck

Remains, where all the gain of happiness,  
She'd counted safely won, sank castaway  
Beyond redemption ! It is strange her voice  
Has kept such sweetness through the many years,  
In which that hateful life has clung to her,  
A loathsome living pest."

. . . . .

"Again to-night

We met. I watched her when she knew it not,  
Her face was all at rest ; no pulse's change,  
Or rise or fall of the blood courses stirred  
To trouble it ; but only in her eyes  
There moved a fitful light, and whilst she strove  
To set her face in order line by line,  
I thought they took part with her restless soul  
Against that seeming peace."

. . . . .

. . . . .

“The day, the hour  
Is lonely for her sake. My life has been,  
Until she came in flood of light to it,  
As some blind stream which moveth underground  
Unknowing of its courses.”

“ I'd not wish  
For meeting of the hands. It is enough  
To know her passing with the fall and flow  
Of that fair dress ; and feel the path of feet  
So softly woven where I sit and rest,  
My life all filled with sense of her. She's grown  
A part of me—a necessary thing—  
Without which I myself am not.”

“ My God !  
What is the meaning, what the end of this ?  
For what am I consenting to betray  
That life, which though in failing, still was pure

Of purpose in thy sight? Have I put by  
From me that other face, that pure sweet face,  
Which was my soul's one saving? Is it gone,  
That past, gone hopelessly beyond recall,  
Like some great treasure, which a sleeper lays  
Beside him, and in waking, finds it not?  
Am I that same, who once would dream to lift  
World-burdens, and whose love is at this last  
As deadly where it seeks to love, as hate  
Of other men? Is this the end of hopes  
To lighten sorrow in the world, that I  
Have overborne that bruised and stricken life,  
Which, but for touch of mine, had still clung on  
In peace to its own sinless growing-place,  
And found its safety?"

So he writes. Enough!

Just read this little further—'twill suffice  
For all our readings :

“ I have looked to-day  
So long and calmly at it—stript it bare  
Of vain pretences that surrounded it,  
Put black for black, and white for white, each thing  
With its own colour. Let that come what will,  
I'll hold no glozing language to my heart ;  
Here's right, there's wrong, before me plain enough  
To choose. I'll make no twilight for myself,  
With half-seen meaning and disguise of words ;  
But what I do,—if 'tis to pluck this thing  
From out my heart—if 'tis to sin and fall  
For ever—shall be done with open eyes  
And fully-gathered purpose. I have sought  
To count the gain and loss, as if I paused  
Upon a plan some doubting friend had laid  
Before me. Shall I turn again and seek  
That life of wrestling pain where shadows crowd,  
And evil faces stealing from their midst  
Laugh low and gibber, ere they snatch themselves



Away ; go slay-like back and tread the round  
Of weary days, unprofited by smile  
Or voice of tender speakings which can bring  
Such soothing, as white hands to brows of fire ;  
Or else, and this were best, yield all, put by  
The sword I've handled with so poor a heart ;  
Confess my fingers grasped too large a hilt  
For them to hold by ; so accept defeat ?  
There must be many others in this world,  
Who stand at last upon the spot where life  
So duly planned, fails utterly, and they  
Will put it from them with unflinching hands,  
And say, in looking on it, 'Tis pure loss  
And sheer defeat—there'll be no salvage here  
To pay.' I count the matter of slight worth  
If one more gains or loses. Will the world  
Find time for grieving, though a life be left  
Of broken hopes and promise on its sands,  
Uncounted midst all other wrecks ?"

. . . . .  
. . . . .  
"The past  
Is dead, but dreameth in me. As they sat,  
The lotus-eaters of the silent shore,  
And thought of home, yet thought not to return,  
I look upon the former things, which pass  
In noiseless driftings, whilst I find no will,  
No saving will to reach out hand or voice  
Before they pass for ever."

"Let them pass !  
'Tis time to put this seeming of the things  
That are not, off from me ; 'tis time this lie  
Should cease, and straightway bare to those pure eyes  
The baseness I have hid from her. Why strive ?  
Why always strive, when in defeat is rest,  
The rest of men who lay aside their toil  
And sleep by gliding streams ? No more to wage

Unequal conflicts of the right and wrong ;  
No more to follow vain imaginings,  
Crying, like spirit-voices, to go forth  
And seek a phantomed purity in waste  
And wilderness ; that this should cease, should pass,  
Lost in great silence ;—oh ! how deep would be  
The heart's relief in reaching to an end ;  
What matters what the end, if life be free  
From pain of striving with a ceaseless strife ?”





#### BOOK IV.

THE storms and rains which wearied all the week  
Had wept themselves away, and fresh and fair  
The sun rose on that Sabbath, as a king  
Come back in joy to his inheritance.  
All things breathed gladness in the peace restored  
To earth, as if in token of God's day,  
And softly rang to us the village-bells,  
Learning fresh sweetness on their sunny path  
Across the waters. On that morning came  
To Margaret a letter from our boy ;  
How fair and happy in that day's sunshine  
She moved amongst us, as she smiled and said,  
"Till tasks of teaching were at end, she'd place  
Aside his letter ; when the westward sun

Brought homely rest, we would no more delay  
Our heart's enjoyment of it." 'Twas long since  
Our boy had written, and his letters came  
A household joy, full of sweet rambling talk,  
Which brought him back amongst us, as we sat  
And read ; and so she put it in her breast,  
And bore it all the day with her. The church  
Lay 'cross the water, and our little boat  
Found highway. As it chanced, the morning tides  
Ran strong to seaward, whilst the lazy wind  
Kept failing ere it brought to us its help ;  
And much we doubted, laughingly, in spite  
Of vexing consequence, if we should make  
Our point ; but she (there was no fishing lad  
You'd find along the coast to bring his boat  
As closely to the wind) with yielding touch  
Upon the helm, compelled the shifty breeze  
To serve our purpose. So we gained the church,  
And she knelt down amidst the simple folk.

I know not why, but when we knelt in church,  
My heart would rise up in its love for her,  
And I would miss my prayers for need to turn  
And watch her praying ; it was so that day ;  
A softness clung to her, as if the air  
Was overshadowed by some angel's wing  
Who knelt down at her side. Her very dress,  
In its loose gentle fallings, seemed to pray  
With her, and there, throughout that hour, with hands  
That drew his letter closer on her breast,  
She lifted up her soul in one long prayer  
Of sister's love, nor knew that if she bore  
A naked dagger on her heart, its point  
Had cleft less deeply. At the last the day  
Grew crimson in the west ; and we reached home  
And sat together. With the casement set  
Awide to catch the fragrant air, I watched  
The Lake ; whilst she was well content to pluck  
From out the gentle keeping of her breast

The day's desire, and sat, her whole soul spent  
On line and letter. Fairer than fair dreams,  
Low lay the lake. It wore an earnestness,  
As if it held communion with the heaven  
That leant to it, and such a breath of prayer  
And praise seemed rising up, I thought that God  
Had not been nearer to us in the church,  
When words of blessing thro' the silence fell  
On bended heads, than in that evening hour.  
Then, turning from a loveliness which smote  
Upon the inmost life, and seemed to leave  
No craving of the heart unsatisfied,  
I looked at her. She held with straining hands  
The letter off from her upon her knees ;  
The page drooped, where it lay, and partly caught  
A gleam of evening light ; while a great shade  
Came creeping down her forehead ; there it paused,  
And hung and overdarkened all her face.  
Beneath it the blood currents froze ; the bloom

Passed off her cheek, and the soft flesh grew hard  
And fixed as marble, while alone her eyes,  
Moist-shining in a light of tears, betrayed  
The life of the great sorrow which was stirred  
Within. Then silently she gave it me,  
And signed that I should read; and thus it ran:—  
“’Tis a hard thing where two have loved a love,  
Which left outside itself no lightest thought,  
No hour of living, when the one must say,  
‘I am unworthy of this love.’ Our love,  
Which was to be so purified and set  
Up higher—this delight, this dream of ours,  
Is ended, broken utterly, for sake  
Of my unworthiness. I grieve not more,  
Poor Margaret, for thee, than for the love  
Itself, which now reveals how much it held,  
Of dross and earthy failure. It had been,  
I yet am thinking, it had been so fair,  
And made of common life so sweet a thing,—



But I, whose hand you held, have turned my back  
Upon the pleasant places and the paths  
We trod together. Vows of childish hearts,  
And covenants of truth, imaginings  
Of minds that sought for nobleness, sweet talk  
Which would outlast the sweetness of those days  
Of summer rambles, strivings hand-in-hand  
To climb to common height ;— in all of these  
I've sold my birthright, and of all am found  
Unworthy. 'Tis a past in which I tried,  
While you were standing over me to teach,  
To play an equal part with you. I tried  
And made my failure. Once long-since I dreamt  
That when we met, you turned your head away ;  
And I stood grieving for your face's light  
Withheld. And now at last 'tis come on me,  
As often I have feared it would, this dream.  
For I have chosen 'evil for my good,'  
And signed with all foreknowledge—not surprised,

Not through some slip of hand—my bond with sin.  
That sin—altho' my life is henceforth made  
Up wholly of it—I am seeking words  
Will leave it half-unsaid to you. Some months  
Agone, I had no thought which was not yours,  
Yours as of right, yours simply. You had looked  
As clearly and as far into my heart  
As into those blue waves you love. I sought  
To throw no shadow on the smallest thing  
Of all our talkings. Now I dare not take  
The simpler word, to tell you of that life  
Which will be mine henceforth, thro' all the years,  
In some strange home, with her who shares my sin.  
And so farewell. With no false hand, no heart  
That learns and then betrays, to lean upon,  
You'll walk in that fair garden of delight,  
Alone, where both have wandered. That for me  
Is closed for ever. If I could come back,  
See you, and touch your hand, and hear your words

I would not. Where full feast was mine, think not  
I'd feed on the loose crumbs you'd haply throw  
In pity, rather than the old-days' love,  
As I stood fasting ; I'd not beg the grace  
To quench my thirst with lees of that spent cup  
In whose full sweetness once I bathed my lips.

“ Do you remember how I gave to you  
A piece of broken gold ? 'Twas in our boat ;  
The wind scarce stirred in summer idleness ;  
We sat beneath the listless sails, and you  
Had bared and dipt a white arm, elbow-deep,  
And let the soft blue water print on it  
A thousand kisses. I, in giving, said,  
That when our love should be outworn by time  
Or the world's using, we would wear that gold  
I broke, no longer, but the waves should take  
The keeping of it. So we promised there ;  
And I three nights ago went back and saved  
The promise. In the lake's blue heart I dropped

One broken half, and out of reach and sight  
In the broad golden trouble of the moon  
It trembled slowly down ; and then I knew  
That our life's loving lay beneath the wave  
For ever with it. From your window shone  
The lamp, you've placed there ever since that night,  
When, coming back from school,—'twas late, and you  
Had ceased your watching,—in the thought of home  
With boyish fearlessness I planned to swim  
Those two long miles ; and, as it chanced, you set  
Your lamp that night within the window-niche,  
And read with open casement. On the lake  
Its light shone to me like a friendly hand  
Stretched out to help, and through that weary way  
I fastened all my soul on it, and looked  
Not right nor left ; but when all force had left  
My failing strokes, and the chill waves began  
To drag against me heavily, it chanced  
You stood up all in white, and watched the plain

Of midnight waters. As you stood, I knew  
That there was saving for me, and I cried  
Aloud, my last strength spent upon the cry.  
Then as the light went swaying up and down  
Before my eyes, and the quick painful sobs  
Rose fluttering in my breast, I still could feel  
Your coming to me. At the last I heard  
The gliding of your boat, which brought me help  
Through the dark water, and was saved. And so,  
Altho' you've known it not, yet many times  
You've come since then, and saved me when the flood  
Had well-nigh closed above my head its night  
Of waters. Now you may not come; for me  
There is no saving. I must go my way.  
Our lives are rent in twain. Live thou in peace  
With thy sweet life; whilst I build up a wall  
To hide from me all things we loved, all thoughts  
We thought together, that I look no more  
On what is no more mine. Farewell, forget

Our past for ever.    Cast away your gold  
Into the deepest pool ; it will refind  
Its severed half before we love anew.”

And there that eve, that Sabbath-eve, the lake  
Kept smiling in our faces while we held  
That burning letter in our hands.    Be still  
O heart ! the law is written everywhere—  
The sun to its fair shining in the west ;  
The lake to its white beauty ; man alone  
To ceaseless, hopeless, unavailing grief.





## BOOK V.

ON went the months,—thro' sorrow as thro' joy  
Indifferently, like the world itself  
Rolled on for ever through the days and nights,  
And never lingering to bask in light  
Or rest in shadow. Then, as weary month  
To month gave way, she'd say with such a smile,  
As that which overflows from hearts that love  
And break, to lips whose gladness is worn out,  
"We still will wait and pray." And still she trimmed  
And set, as in the other days, that lamp  
Within the window-niche, and there it watched  
Above the lonely darkness of the lake  
With patient, constant shining, like her faith

That God would bring him back at last to her ;  
And at the last he came.

One night it chanced  
We sat together with the lights unlit  
And casement open. As we sat the night  
Came creeping in upon our talk and hung  
Loose shadows round her with a trembling hand,  
Until it slowly drew her from my sight,  
And only let the sweetness of her words  
Come through to me, like flakes of snow men feel  
Fall on them in the night. "I pray" she said  
"To judge aright in this. I once would put  
The thought back, as it rose and filled my heart,  
That I would seek him, for I ever said,  
'He will not see my face, or hear my words,  
For sake of her, made part with him, and bound  
In bond of sin for sin.' And like some wall  
Of night, she stood between us twain. But now



My heart is changed of purpose. As the years  
Go on, I know not if he lives or dies,  
Or, if some change, what change of grief or pain  
Has passed on him. Perchance God means to use  
This helpless love in other way for him  
Than that of watching, and will guide my steps  
Aright. Perchance God placeth in his heart  
Some want of me, that I should come and stand  
Beside him as of old. If not, if still  
The past is sealed to him, I will return  
To wait and pray."

But need was not.

Three days  
Had not gone past, when Ethel came to me ;  
My mother's youngest, whose eight years were full  
Of loving and of waywardness, as are  
The seas of sun and shadow. With her smiles  
Laid by, and with grave earnest eyes that  
sought

Some sign in mine, she told how at her play  
There came one questioning, who stood and asked  
Of many things, and charged her bear this word,  
That cousin Hubert fain would speak with me  
Hard by. And when the stranger named himself,  
Our child drawn to him in some kindly way  
I know not (save his sadness won her heart)  
Stretched out her arms to him, but he forbore,  
And put her gently from him with sad words ;  
“ You must not kiss me Ethel, for my lips  
Are not as those you kiss.” Whereon the child,  
Who would refuse her kisses to strange lips  
Which begged such grace of them, still drawn to him  
In all defiance of his gainsaying,  
Had stoutly answered she knew well she might,  
For every morning in their prayers they prayed  
For cousin Hubert. So he let it be,  
And as he kissed her, on her cheek she felt  
The tears mixed with the kiss. All this I drew

Forth slowly with much questioning. Like one  
In dreams I rose, and dreaming sought for him.

And when he stood by Margaret, I saw  
How much the fashion of his face was changed.  
Its light was quenched in ashes ; and there sat  
On it a winter, where there was no smile,  
No touch of gladness, lingering still amidst  
The ruins of his wasted comeliness.  
And there he slowly said, "She whom I've left  
Lies dying ; and she prays that thou would'st come  
Straightway. Perchance in coming thou shalt bring  
God's mercy, which is placed beyond our prayer."  
He paused ; through hands close-folded on her face,  
The struggling sobs spoke only ; then he said,  
"When our two lives were parted, Margaret,  
One right, the other left, I said to you,  
'I've tried, and made my failure.' Once again  
I've tried and failed. I thought that I could set

The order of my life that God should stand  
Apart, kept back from share in it, and cried—  
The potsherd to the hand that moulded it—  
'Let Him judge where I failed. It is His world,  
His good and evil, and His hand that laid  
Alike on us our weakness and His law ;—  
Let Him judge, for whose pleasure all men fail,  
And make His judgment clear.' I thought to say  
To mine own heart 'Be still—refrain thyself—  
Let all our past be sealed betwixt us twain'  
And like some child that's chidden it should live  
Hushed into silence. I knew not as yet  
That whilst God yields all other things to men,  
Made subject to their use, the heart He keeps  
In His own hand and turns it as a sword  
Against what man He pleaseth. So I planned  
And vainly, like a fool, I made my plans.  
He placed His worm beneath my gourd. That sin  
I'd challenged so defiantly became

A pestilential thing, which rotting lay  
In me, and poisoned all the springs of life ;  
Until there grew abhorrence of myself,  
Like one, who having feeling in the grave,  
Is conscious of corruption, and is seized  
With loathing of his flesh. Old pains laid by—  
The conflict of the base and purer self—  
Came back in thought, and seemed so light to bear,  
That I had kissed the hand of any pain  
Which had restored the days, when still I shared  
In rightful strivings. Oh ! believe me this,  
Men know not when they suffer for His law,  
How light is all their suffering by the side  
Of that, wherein there is no light, no hope,  
No raising of the heart, no strength to bear,  
But all is dark in the presence of the sin  
Which never sleeps. And now if any pain  
Shall bring me profit at this last, if God—  
I know not ; but for her who sinned the less,

His mercy may be open to thy prayer.”  
Then, as his voice failed utterance, she wound  
Her arms about his neck, and clung and wept  
Her whole heart out, with long-pent bitterness  
Of years, upon his breast.     So they arose  
And went their way, and ’twas the last, last time  
We looked upon the faces that we loved.

           And this is all I know : when she had died—  
She to whose death-bed Margaret had gone,—  
They were returning to us, but their ship  
Struck on a rock, and when there wanted room  
Within the boat, they stept back on the deck,  
And yielded place to others.     But the waves  
Were tender in their rage, nor strove to part  
The hands which clung together as of old.



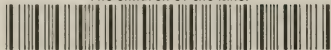








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